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A Mother's Album

Elmore

A MOTHER'S STORY.

BY MRS. A. ELMORE.

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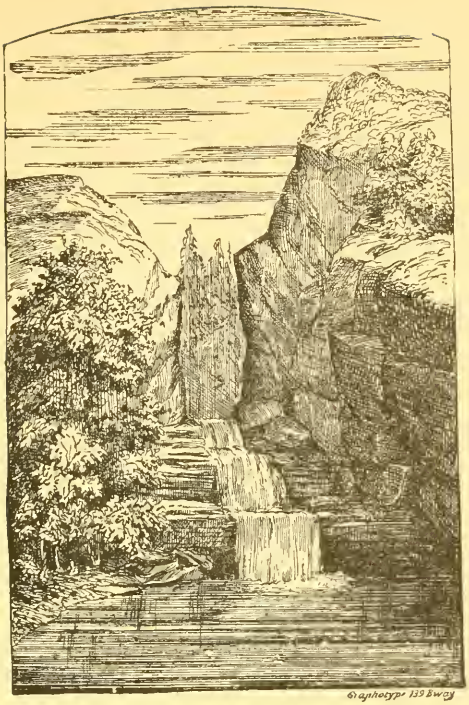


Down o'er the rocks, and through the vales,
    There floweth e'er, with silver sheen—
A type of that which never fails—
    A river, deep, and pure, and clean.
The birds may fold their wings and drink,
And fawns may linger at the brink,
And meadow grasses sip their fill,
And wild sweet flowers feel the thrill
    Of the murm'ring praiseful song,
    As the waters rush along.

So through the heart, if opened wide,
Shall flow an ever-blissful tide
Of mem'ries sweet pure love hath won
Through kindly words and deeds well done.
Then all the lines that Time may trace
Will add a touch of winsome grace
E'en to the fairest woman face
Who helps to lift a fallen race.
The wine-god's chain of welded strength
To her strong faith must yield at length.

Written at the request of my darling sister, CIVILLA E. MORRISON, of Meadville, Pa., one of the working bees in the great hive of true and loving Christian women who dispense the honey of consolation and the mead of courage to those who are in the toils of the Tempter, and so gather to themselves inestimable sources for enjoyment during the Winter of Life.

Presented to "The Women's Christian Temperance Union," of Newark, N. J., by

THE AUTHORESS.

PART I.

Mid faces calm, or falsely fair,
And brows by anxious lines o'ertraced,
Some bright with joy, some pale with care,
And some in stony guardings cased,
In the city's varying chance,
I oft met one, so pure and strong,
No eye but gave a second glance,
From out the busy, restless throng.
I wondered if that woman soul,
So strangely strong, so lifted high,
Had quaffed from rim of mystic bowl
The nectared "Peace" for which we sigh.

Enthroned in mist of snowy hair,
And in her charming, noble face,
So ever calm, so dainty fair,
There reigned a true angelic grace.
Some hearts throbbed wildly, as she passed,
Urged by rankling, envious thought:
"Her sky with storms is not o'ercast;
Her web of life is not inwrought

With tangled skeins of bitter wrong
Most skillful hand can never right;
Her heart is thrilled with joyous song;
Her eyes see nought but sunny light."
Swift through my brain the whisper sped,
Like flash from darkling thunder cloud,
"In pleasant paths her feet are led,
Else she were not so Angel-browed."

A vision seemed she of the clime
Where change comes not, and Love doth reign;
Where nought of sorrow, or of crime,
Can mar the peace, or leave a stain;
A vision from some purer air,
That wakes a thought of Angel wings.
Along her pathway, oft a prayer
From arid hearts unbidden springs,
And purer thoughts swift enter in
The careless soul, when that pure eye
Reproof conveys,—reproof of sin,
So gently given to passers by.

Time drifted on, year after year,
Into the past, beyond recall,
While never once upon my ear
Her name, or voice, had chanced to fall.
I named her—to myself alone—
In artist phrase, "A Dream of Peace;"
Nor sought to greet the fair unknown:
The dreamland glamour then might cease.

PART II.

One Sabbath's quiet coaxed my feet
  Within an humble house of prayer,
Where anthemed words, most wondrous sweet,
  Trilled on the balmy summer air;
And lo! my friend, whose fair white hand
  Had never then been clasped in mine,
With calm, sweet face, and eyes so grand
  They seemed to me almost divine,
Looked searching into other eyes
  Of woman faces gathered there,
A silent wist, that woke surprise,
  And crimson tints, or angry stare.

Then, her rich voice, strong in the power
  That comes of contrite ofttime plea,
With Resignation's wondrous dower,
  Of rare entrancing harmony,
In touching words, her lips o'erbrimmed.
  Sin-calloused hearts were deeply thrilled,
The earnest truths seemed Angel-hymned,
  And all the grey-walled chapel filled
With air of Angel homes. Sweet Peace
  On noiseless wings through some hearts swept,

When lo! their sorrows had surcease
In such sweet calm, with joy they wept.
Then dropped her voice to plaintive tone,
And brimmed her eyes with tears unshed;
Her lips but held at bay the moan
That with her words would gladly wed;
A moment's silent, heart-deep prayer,
Swept from her eyes the blinding tears;
Then through the stillness reigning there,
There fell these words on list'ning ears:

"My story I must tell to you to-day,
Though ceaseless waves of sorrow surge and sway
Through my slow-healing, woe-bowed, weary heart,
And leaves my being racked in every part.
My cry, that reaches to the throne of God,
Is, let none other feel the chast'ning rod
As I have felt it, ere I learned to bow
And say, Thy will be done, O Lord, e'en now.

When youth, with lavish dowry, wondrous fair,
My rounded cheek with rose and lily decked,
My eyes held mirth so deeply mirrored there,
That Joy seemed all too sure to e'er be wrecked.
A wealth of hair fell glossy rippling down,
From fashion's bondage free, to curling cling

About my shoulders bare, or form a crown
That mocked in hue the raven's shining wing.

Young Love came first upon the fairy scene,
And wove about my heart a magic spell;
But ere I knew the jewel's worth, its sheen
Was lost to sight—borne out upon the swell
Of Death's encroaching, e'er resistless sea;
And I was left to moan, and wring my hands,
Or stretch them out in blind and wordless plea,
Toward the clouds above life's fitful sands.

Then was given to me a son—a princely son,

Whose ebon locks and dark bright eyes
Bore likeness to my own. My love was won
To all its depths. I learned to idolize
The jewel fair—the heaven-sent, princely gift,
And he was boldly throned my heart's true king.
No grateful incense did I kneeling lift,
No prayerful offering ever humbly bring.

Each day seemed then a heaven complete to me,
As my boy grew tall, and wise, strong, and fair,

Till manhood ruled instead of childish glee;
Then, nought for *him* I would not do, or dare.

One morning, bright as summer morn could be,
I kissed his cheek, and watched with eager eyes
His graceful figure down the street. Ah, me!
No thought had I of near and sad surprise.
No sun had set when I had failed to see
My precious one, and ne'er a dread surmise
Came trailing by. My thoughts from fear were free,
But oft employed new pleasure to devise.

Fast to my lightsome heart the day sped on,
To o'erflow filled with laughter and with song.

That day—the last my son e'er looked upon—
I passed amid a gay and thoughtless throng.

In all his royal robing, gaily decked,
The Sun went down the far-off western skies,
As though in all his realm no hopes were wrecked,
And looking on were nowhere tear-filled eyes.
Yet ere the twilight's greying hour was done,
Came, slow and gently, stranger feet, to bring
What once had been my fair and princely son.
At my feet they laid a mangled, shapeless thing—
A fearful thing for mother eyes to see:
The ghastly crushing of his forehead fair,
The pallid lips that held no word for me,
And crimson staining of his dark-hued hair.

A hand that else had been his friend's,
When maddened by the red wine's evil fire,
Thrilled with the demon hate, that oft attends
And conquers manhood, with strong passion's ire
Had rudely broken Life's so brittle thread—
With murd'rous arm had stilled a kindly heart,
And sent him mangled home to me. Not dead;
For reeking odors pressed his lips apart.
I knelt and prayed to him: "Oh! once again
But speak my name, or ope your kindly eyes,
Or tell me how to soothe your dying pain."—
No look or word gave answer to my cries.

For aye were still, his willing, active feet;
His shapely hands held Death's stiffening cramp;
His loving, wayward heart, must cease to beat;
His lips must wear Death's seal, so cold and damp,

And I must walk henceforth through life alone.
My idol, formed of fairest human clay,
Had fallen from its love-reared, lofty throne;
Low at my feet, all wrecked and crushed, it lay,

And I was plunged in night more dark and dense
Than earth had ever known when storm prevailed;
A childless widow,—whelmed with grief intense,—
Death's shadowy form I would have gladly hailed.

Not one swift flowing tear had I to shed,
No wild and bitter plaint, no sound of moan;
But shocked, and dumb, from that sad sight was led
By gentle hands away. The kindest tone
I heard not in that hour of dark despair.
So slow the night-watch wore at last away,
While still my eyes held fast their tearless stare,
At dawn my ebon locks were silvery grey,
And from my lips the wonted smile was gone;
My cheeks had lost for aye their rosy bloom.
The storm had passed, and lo! I drifted on
Through life's o'ershadowed sea and ceaseless gloom.

That awful, dumb despair, gave way at last
To thrilling thoughts—accusing, mournful tones;

And trailing by, in sable robes, The Past
Filled all my being with regretful moans:
For I, who loved him more than else on earth—
More, by far, than aught in heaven above—
Had blindly cursed him,—even from his birth
Had taught his baby lips the wine to love;
Had marked the sparkling depths, and held the glass
To drink his health; smiling when his wit was keen,
When flashed his beaming eyes—that now, alas!
Could answer mine no more. Their dark-hued sheen
Was lost beneath the mystic seal of Death;
And lo! the curse had fallen most on me.
I dared not pray. With strange, half-fainting breath,
Only a presence dread I seemed to see.
So vengeful were its sleepless, searching eyes,
So wide its night-dark, noiseless wings were spread,
They smothered all my proud heart's useless cries,
And burdened all my life with ceaseless dread.

I had not where to hide me from the gaze
Of "The Avenging One." So, held at bay,
Mocked by mem'ries of other, happy days,
Veiled from the world by mask of smiling gay,
I found, at last, a sheltered, narrow path.
Through the vista, dim and far, fell a stream
Of light, so pure, the ever-haunting wrath
Of the weighting curse could not hide the gleam.
How eager all my strength I garnered then,
While o'er my lips there swept such earnest plea,
As on I sped along the awesome glen—
Where penitential tears are shed so free—
On tow'rd the gate, far up the mountain height,
The blessed gate, that opes on Paradise.
On, right on, and the beacon-light
Seemed a kingly glory to my weary eyes.

On, through the new-found, safe and restful way,
I followed fast, with heart grown strangely light,
And, lifting up my voice, I learned to pray.
My feet at last had found the path of right.

Then to me was given this work to do:
In love, I show to loving mother eyes
The need to shun the wine-cup's tempting hue;
For in its depths a fell destroyer lies.
No hand can touch the base, unhallowed thing,
Or bring within the walls which Love hath built
The subtle power, and think to miss the sting
It leaves at last, in demon-prompted guilt.

That we each may prove brave and true, and strong,
Let all hearts here in meekness bow them low,
And pray for strength to fight each human wrong,
For guiding wisdom in the way we go;
Patient, when all our work seems wholly lost,
And wayward feet are oft inclined to stray;
Willing, without the thought to count the cost;
Earnest to glean through all the weary day."

Many a tear-filled, loving eye
Was lifted up to Him on high,
Whose arm of strength was all made bare
For conquest, through the power of prayer.

PART III.

Deep graven, as with magic pen,
And brighter now than even then,
I see within that chapel wall
The pleading woman—hear her call,
Addressed to Him who held her trust,
The Ever Loving, Ever Just.
The graceful form, so tall, and straight;
The open eyes, that sought the gate
Where pass the angels to and fro,
With balm to heal the wounds of woe;
Beseeching raised, her fair white hands,
As lifting up the golden strands
Of heart-deep prayer, all unheard
By mortal ear. But not a word
Sandalphon lost, low hovering there
To bind in wreaths their every prayer;
And in his mercy-moulded cup,
To dew the wreaths, were gathered up
The mother's tears, that softly fell,
O'erflowing from a new-found well.

Then, softly through the Summer haze,
The sun dropped down some glory rays
O'er the tearful, up-turned face,
Adding to the spirit-grace
Beaming on her cheeks so fair,
Crowning rich her snowy hair,
Running like a golden thread
Through the words her sweet lips said—
Words from out the heart-deep well,
More full of love than she could tell.
E'en when the rising crystal swell
O'erflowed in tears, that softly fell

Unheeded o'er her cheeks adown,
Bright glinting on her silken gown,
Like the crystal drops of dew
Morn's fair angel loves to strew
O'er the flowers, as her feet
Wake the odors, passing sweet.

Wond'rous face, in pleading raised;
Clear, true eyes, that upward gazed
Where the portals open stand—
Portals of the heavenly land.
O that earnest, heart-full prayer
Must find welcome entrance there.
"Dear Lord," her lips a-tremble speak,
"We sisters all Thy grace do seek.
Here, humbly kneeling at Thy gate,
In tearfulness and faith, we wait
The answer pledged in Thy dear Word—
No prayer floats by Thy throne unheard.
To mother-love Thy guidance grant;
Within all hearts, we pray Thee, plant
The spring of life—'A love for Thee.'
From that pure fount temptations flee.
These mothers, Lord, when life is done,
May at Thy feet lay every son,
If so they will to do Thy will,
And all their holy duties fill.

Like arms of love, that gather in
And save the lost from thrall of sin,
My arms would clasp and lift to Thee
All woman hearts, till they were free
From craven fear, and strong and brave
To work with Thee, and help to save
From that broad way which leads to woe,
While glaring lights and mocking show
Hide well the proof, the shame, and wrong,
That have their birth where'er the throng
Of thoughtless ones their wine-cups drain,
To feel the fire course through the brain.

Help us to break the spoiler's snare,
For careless feet spread everywhere.
Help all to 'scape the wine-cup's thrall,
Ere far from Mercy's gate they fall.
Help each on Thee, the strong, to lean,
While 'neath Thy love their heads they screen
From the tempest howling by—
From the tempter watching nigh.
And I, dear Lord," (low bend her knees,)
" Whom Thou hast brought through troubled seas,
Hear Thou my cry: clothe Thou my heart
With power all Thine; new strength impart,
That I each vantage gained may hold,
And in Thy cause be firm and bold.
Although Thou choosest weak, frail hands
To crush the giant's galling bands,
'Tis Thine the honor all shall be,
When we shall come to reign with Thee."

Still more her fair head seemed to bow;
Her hands unclasped, and pressed her brow;
The tears, that trickled o'er each palm
In silence, brought the needed calm.

All hearts were joined in sweet refrain,
When her sweet lips were oped again,
In low-voiced words a child might ken,
"Thy blessing grant us now—Amen."

PART IV.

Low the shadows length'ning fall
To the farther chapel wall;
Drops the sun adown the sky,
And the evening draweth nigh—
The evening of the Sabbath-day
That brought to many hearts a ray
Of hope and joy, in the thought,
"Woman hands have useful wrought
In the vineyard—oh, so wide—
Where the Lord doth ever guide
E'en the gleaners through the field,
While His arm doth safely shield
From the storms that hover near,
Till the 'Harvest Home' we hear."

Then apart they wend their way.
Blessed close of blessed day,
That wove such tender, subtle bands,
Expressed in touch of mother hands.
Strong golden threads pure love had spun;
A cabled strength, but just begun,
That soon will lift all women near
The fount of truth, so crystal clear.

Then they shall win, through love alone,
The boons they crave, and full atone
For years of sloth by earnest life.

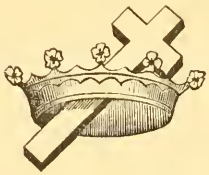
The sister fair, the loving wife,
The mother dear, whose snowy hair
Is blanched and grey with wearing care,
And fairy child, with winsome way,

Will all unite, a grand array,
And conq'ring come to break the charm
That lurks in drink;—'t will cease to harm
The fair and brave, the good and true.

His kingdom gone, with nought to do,
And all men free through woman's power,
King Rum must die. God speed that hour,
And save the sons that crown the lives
Of mothers true; and bless the wives
That sorrow now in half despair,
And droop and die 'neath burd'ning care.

Then none may say, as oft my friend,
While faithfully her footsteps wend
Through all the dark and winding ways
Where outcast woman willing strays,

Through brilliant glare of gaudy hall
Where many through temptations fall:
"All coming days so spent, my own
For thy dear life can not atone,
Nor blot my sins away so clean
My soul will find its virgin sheen;
For I, oh son of mine, must wear
This ever galling chain, and bear
The thought, too true, renewed each day,
A life laid waste, and led astray
A soul God-given. In love I ween
A glimpse of heaven, so pure and clean,
A careless mother's hand has lost;
And none may know the awful cost
In weary pain, in shame, and tears,
In doubts, and awesome, ceaseless fears."



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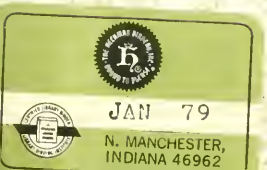
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